

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



Summer 2017

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

From the Terrorism Alert Desk

Sorry, we don't mean to alarm you. Or do we?

In Erik Larsen's *The Garden of Beasts*, Hitler's administration in 1933 is described as making "a deliberate effort to generate a kind of daily suspense."

Sinclair Broadcasting is doing its best to do the same in 2017.

For PP readers who still monitor local network news shows on old-fashioned television, Sinclair's KGAN station out of Cedar Rapids offers a strange "news" feature three times a week. Just before a commercial break, usually following an everyday story about a nursing home being investigated or a neighborhood raising money for a child's surgery, an attractive moderator suddenly appears in a brightly-colored studio as the words *From the Terrorism Desk in Washington DC* are sternly spoken off-camera. The moderator, white and well-dressed, then delivers "news" of dangers from afar.

The news is generally not as urgent or as relevant as the nursing home, the ill child, the housing development, the flood mitigation project, or the shooting on the edge of town, but it generates a kind of daily suspense. "ISIS attack kills three." "US considers sending more forces to Afghanistan." "French

police arrest suspect in cafe bombing." "A final assault on Mosul is planned for sometime this summer."

After three or four similar squibs, accompanied by grainy footage of brown-skinned machine-gunners and grenade throwers against a backdrop of smoking rubble, we...cut to a commercial, and breathe again.



What the hell just happened? Well, it happens regularly on Sinclair-owned stations all across our frightened land. If Sinclair's merger with Tribune Media is approved, this subtle fear-mongering -- hidden in plain sight -- will appear on over 200 stations, spanning most major TV markets and reaching about one-third of American homes.

It's hard to know what the average viewer of KGAN-Channel 2 in the Cedar Rapids/Iowa City area thinks when seeing a polished anchor person at a polished desk recite ominous bulletins from distant shores. The segments fit

seamlessly into the rest of the evening news. They appear to a part of the regular local broadcast. They are not.

Just as Hitler intentionally kept the populace in a permanent state of emergency (and as Trump keeps the general citizenry in perpetual anxiety), so does Fox News, Sinclair Broadcasting, and mainstream outlets like CNN, endlessly repeating scenes of blood and panic, milking our emotions, continuing the coverage long after the event occurs. When the people are fearful, the terrorists have won. And so has Sinclair.

The Sinclair merger-acquisition will be well worth the price tag of \$3.9 billion. The company will add WHO and QWAD to its Iowa roster of KGAN, KDSM, and KTVO, and establish a presence in Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York City as it challenges Fox News for nation-wide right-wing hegemony. And have money left over to hire Bill O'Reilly.

Prairie Progressive readers should contact Sinclair at www.sbg.net/contact or call their national headquarters in Baltimore at 410-568-1500. Tell them you don't need a phony desk to alert you to the nearly non-existent threat of foreign terrorists in your daily life. We already have enough suspense. ✘

—Prairie Dog

Bernie Sanders for Governor of Iowa

All Democrats understand the great damage that Republicans have done to Iowa in a very short time, but we are far from being clear on how to undo the damage.

Obviously, we must elect a Democratic governor, and take back control of both houses of the legislature. How do we do that?

The first task is to recognize that business as usual is not good enough. The Republicans did not merely take the White House; they won at every level of government across the entire country. The fundamental reason was the economy.

We are in an economic recovery characterized by low wages, job insecurity, and health care insecurity. Two candidates in the last election campaign addressed those issues. The first was Donald Trump, who blamed the economic woes faced by working class Americans on low wage immigration and foreign competition based on free market trade policies such as NAFTA. The other was Bernie Sanders, who came forward with a comprehensive non-racist alternative set of policies: a one trillion dollar New Deal style green jobs program, a \$15 an hour minimum wage with no exceptions, universal national health insurance (i.e. Medicare for all), and tuition-free education in our public community colleges and universities.

Sanders also addressed widespread public concern about corporate domination of our elections by refusing to take corporate campaign contributions and limiting individual contributions to \$2700. (His campaign is now sending refund checks to individuals who exceeded that limit). He had plenty of money, contradicting the conventional Democratic Party wisdom that raising

money is the way to win elections, and limiting contributions is nothing more than a form of "unilateral disarmament."

Sanders won 45% of the elected delegates to the Democratic National Convention. He began his campaign by winning the Iowa caucuses, in the normal sense of the word "win," i.e. more caucus attenders supported him than any other candidate. He did this despite the fact that not one single Democrat in the Iowa House or Senate caucused for him.

A number of legislators, as well as other Democratic Party leaders and fundraisers, have already expressed an interest in the Democratic nomination for governor. A crowded field gives Democrats an opportunity to have a serious discussion about what is to be done. Is it "business as usual," promising to undo the damage that Republicans have done, or is Iowa ready for a version of Sanders's New Deal approach, including free tuition and a \$15 minimum wage?

Cathy Glasson, a nurse and union activist in Iowa City, believes like all of the Democrats in restoring collective bargaining rights to public employees, and expanding spending on education. She has also endorsed a \$15 an hour state living wage, and expanding health insurance to all Iowans, although how that is to be done remains to be seen. She has no position yet on corporate campaign contributions, or free tuition at our public community colleges and universities, which is probably the very best way to improve opportunity for working class, small town, and rural Iowans.

John Norris, although he has never held elective office, has the most impressive Democratic Party resume of any of the potential candidates.

Whether or not that will be an electoral advantage, especially given his close association with former pro-corporate Governor and Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, remains to be seen. Norris was a state organizer for the Jesse Jackson campaign in 1988, and has run for Congress. He is extremely knowledgeable about electoral politics, state government, and agricultural policy, and is the only candidate to date to address the issue of big money in politics, challenging the other Democratic candidates to set limits on individual contributions to their campaigns. He has no position yet on corporate PAC contributions, free tuition at community colleges and universities, Medicare for all, or a \$15 Iowa minimum wage.

Representative Todd Prichard is the only candidate so far to commit himself to free tuition at our community colleges, having discovered after looking into it that it is affordable within the limits of the state budget. What he proposes is not exactly free in the sense that our high schools are free. (Why do so many people grasp the concept of a free twelfth grade, but cannot grasp the principle of a free thirteenth grade?) He supports tuition scholarships for students who attend community colleges full time and who agree to work in Iowa for a number of years after graduation. There are a number of reasons why these conditions are a really bad idea, but Prichard deserves credit for addressing the issue of economic opportunity and student debt with concrete proposals. So far, he is silent on campaign finance, the minimum wage, and health care.

Another legislator, Nate Boulton, is an aggressive campaigner who can stir up partisan crowds attacking Republicans. He is good at ducking

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Time to Teamster Up with TeamCAN

It's time to fight fire with fire. The Koch Brothers, ALEC, and their network of ruthless minions are well coordinated and continue to advance their agenda. We all know they're trained strategists, whack jobs, and effective organizers. Guess what - so are we! We're whack jobs for good, though, and we're on the correct side of history. It's time for us to get better coordinated and it's time we took the gloves off. It's time for more good old-fashioned organizing.

It's time to Teamster up in Iowa.

100 years ago, organized labor was more than a collective bargaining agreement. We were an inclusive organization at the neighborhood level that fought *with* the working class instead of for them or for only our own members. We were effective. Our movement was tough. It's time to go back to the future.

The Teamsters Community Action Network (TeamCAN) was founded to enhance and invigorate organizing on the local level. It's the social justice arm of the Teamsters. It's a new framework that evolves and redefines our mission. While the Teamsters Union is one of the strongest labor organizations in the country, the traditional role we play is not enough. The local union will continue with its core mission - raising standards in the worksite while TeamCAN fights at the grass roots level around issues in our communities.

Unlike many other groups who identify themselves as autonomous organizations, TeamCAN is a coalition of progressive networks, organizations, and individuals who have come together to fill gaps in grass roots organizing efforts and provide new models of organizing that are outside of the traditional playbook. TeamCAN is a coalition of traditional

labor organizations, the faith community, the Women's March of Iowa, Iowans for Public Education, Indivisible, millennials, and other organizations and individuals who know that none of us is as strong as all of us. All of those entities are represented on our Board of Directors.

TeamCAN has moved rapidly in the first half of 2017 to fill gaps that were created by people who don't give a damn about working people. One of our major projects has been to create a temp agency co-op that is employee owned. When the state legislature rolled back wages for 65,000 of Iowa's lowest paid employees by rescinding newly passed minimum wage ordinances, we started partnering with workers who knew they could competitively bid against traditional temp agencies but pay \$15.00 an hour - if they had the resources, expertise and help with the start-up process. TeamCAN filled that gap. The Corridor Temp Workers Co-op was formed with the help of TeamCAN and later this month will be putting their first workers in the field at a rate 4 to 5 dollars an hour higher than other temp agencies yet at a lower cost to clients who utilize the co-op. We think we can duplicate this model across Iowa and even the country and change an industry that traditionally keeps people in a cycle of poverty. We're gonna turn the traditional temp agency industry on its head.

In the first half of this year we also divided the state into 6 regions to start providing infrastructure and coordination to the movement. We partnered with Indivisible and trained more than 150 activists from across the state in basic organizing strategies. A vast majority of those who attended were new activists who left with knowledge on setting objectives, research, leadership identification,

mobilization, implementation, and other components of a strategic campaign. 150 newly trained organizers across the state ain't a bad start.

TeamCAN is also partnering with a local mixed martial arts gym to create a mentorship program for kids who need to stay busy and off the streets, a group of local activists in another community who want to run a strategic campaign to repair or replace a bridge that's been closed, creating a barrier to children walking safely to school, as well as other projects that apply basic organizing strategies.

We're a community organization that is Teamster tough. The opposition doesn't have to like us but they're gonna respect us.

You should join the Teamsters organization by becoming a member of TeamCAN. It's 20 bucks a month. We're using the money to organize new campaigns and enhance current efforts of different organizations who are on our side. It funds our fights and puts you in the organization.

There's no shortage of people who are pissed off at what's happening to their state or country, but that alone does us no good. TeamCAN is creating an army of organizers that have the backing of the Teamsters.

Teamster up the movement and join us at www.teamcan.org.

It's Teamster time. ✨

-Jesse Case is Secretary/Treasurer of Teamsters Local 238 and President of TeamCAN



Teamsters Community Action Network

Ringside at the Capitol

The Main Event was scheduled to begin on January 9th, the first day of the Iowa Legislative Session. Not many fans thought the bout would go the distance, but the Democrats were still in the ring after the heavily-favored Republican Party pummeled the underdog in a match that was off the board before the weigh-in.

You knew you were getting into the ring with an 800-pound gorilla. Why didn't you train for this?

The bell rang and you ran to the middle of the mat; you leaned left and it came from his right. POW! You were expecting it, but not with the force that it hit you. It's almost as if his cousin, ALEC, was throwing the punch.

The first punch knocked funding out of the ring for what most progressive Iowans believe to be Iowa's most efficient medical treatment for women and families. You were concentrating on the result of that first punch, so you were barely cognizant of the repeated punches chipping away at Chapter 20, the Iowa Code section allowing public employees to bargain collectively for wages and benefits. It was too late to stop the bleeding on that matter.

Next, he hit you in the gut and it induced vomiting, spewing your workers' compensation claim out of the courts and into the pockets of employers who care little about workplace safety.

Surprisingly, the death penalty died on the way to a subcommittee meeting. That was a lucky punch for you. It was a diversion. Don't let him get away with that trick again. He's got it up his sleeve for a rematch.

"HEY!" you shout. "He hit me below the waist. There was nothing wrong

with the voting process in Iowa. He's cheating!"

"OUCH!" you yell. "He's standing on my toes!" You look up to see him standing his ground. "Can he do that?" you ask. "Now he has a gun; lots of them. And they're everywhere, including inside the Capitol."

"OMG! He just reached into my trunks and took our money." You can't believe it. You cry out: "He's giving it to the people in the ringside seats!" Of course, he is! Those are the people managing the health care you're going to need. Just wait! It'll be okay.

BAM! You want a drink of water when this round is over? I wouldn't recommend that.

Where is the referee? On a slow boat to China? Someone should stop this before someone gets hurt. Too late. No means to sue, and medical insurance has become unobtainable. It happened off the job, don't you know? Meanwhile, the promoter is live-tweeting the event from an oval enclosure out east.

You're asking for your share of the purse? HAH! That was dished out to the advertisers in the form of tax credits. You understood you were the underdog in this fight. What did you expect?

The final bell on the 2017 Legislative Session rang on Saturday, April 22, after an all-nighter.

This Legislature did nothing to help former Governor Branstad work toward his goals of creating "200,000 new jobs, a 15 percent reduction in the cost of government, 25 percent increase in family incomes and having the nation's best schools." Although those goals were to be met originally by 2016, the reality is that they were

not achieved last year, an extra year with both chambers on his side. And they weren't realized this year, either.

The party of local control ruined counties' and municipalities' efforts to manage themselves. Ordinances raising the minimum wage to provide a decent living, banning unsightly plastic bags, and restricting zoning laws were nullified. Another stab at local control was to change a water system that is working and replace it by seizing local assets and placing them under the control of virtual outsiders.

The current majority boasts about its support for local elected leaders to rule themselves, but in reality, leads them around like an overbearing parent. The majority even snubbed their leader, President Trump. One thing this president got right is the idea that we should all be buying American. Nonetheless, the majority passed House File 203, to allow local governments to get around "prevailing wage" and "Buy American" requirements for secondary road projects. The allowance to circumvent the prevailing wage and American goods requirement is not freedom for local government. It's an indirect directive to use cheap labor and goods.

WOW! What will the Republicans do in a rematch, slated for next year? The gorilla didn't get hurt. We have to train better than we did going into this first match.

After the 2016 election, a relative told me that she wanted to do something to change things. Should she get active in the Democratic Party or the League of Women Voters? She felt she needed to register more voters. I told her that we may have enough voters. What we need is to get those

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Hindsight 2020: It Could Have Been Bernie

At the request of Progressive Democrats of America three years ago, Jeff Cox helped pull together the first planning meeting to draft Bernie Sanders to run for President in the Iowa caucuses. About 20 progressive activists gathered in the Iowa City Public Library to hear Conor Boylan (PDA Executive Director) & me (PDA political adviser) make the case that the time was right for a national hearing on the issues we cared about; that Bernie could win Iowa, which would change the whole nomination process; and that Bernie, a Democratic Socialist, could be the next President.

Jeff and his allies deserve great thanks for their efforts, because they were taking a political risk in their home state. Remember, this was at a time when almost everyone thought that Hillary Clinton would be the Democratic Party nominee; when Bernie was just an asterisk in the national polls; when Elizabeth Warren, not Bernie, was the challenger that even most progressive activists hoped for.

And PDA was *the only national progressive organization* that was actively backing Bernie Sanders at that point, having publicly launched its “Run, Bernie, Run (as a Democrat)” draft effort at a national gathering in western Massachusetts in May of 2014 -- more than a year before Bernie officially announced.

Still, we persevered (to borrow a phrase). We launched a national online petition asking Bernie to run, but we also campaigned in Iowa the old-fashioned way. We handed out homemade leaflets at Bernie events. We gave out “Run, Bernie, Run!” stickers and sold buttons. We made it clear, both to Bernie’s team and to progressive activists in Iowa, that there was real and growing support for a Sanders run; that his issues were the ones that mattered to Democratic primary voters; that Bernie could run and do well -- and maybe even win.

That we had the chance to change history.

We were more correct than we knew. Speaking for myself, I certainly did not predict that Bernie would become an icon for young voters, drawing massive crowds in arenas from Portland to Phoenix, from Vado, New Mexico, to Brooklyn, New York. At the start, I could only hope Bernie would draw enough support to win 23 primaries and caucuses!

And I could only dream that Bernie Sanders would draw more Iowans out to vote on caucus night, February 1, 2016, *than any other Democratic candidate ever, except for Barack Obama in 2008*. But that’s what I think happened. I think we pulled out more Bernie backers than Hillary supporters that night, but barely lost out

in the “state delegate equivalent” calculations because much of our campus and independent support was valued less under the opaque formula controlled by the Iowa State Democratic Party.

At this point, of course, I can’t prove my theory one way or the other, because the IDP, using the same transparency logic as Donald Trump does with his tax returns, has refused to make public the actual attendance that night.

Partly thanks to PDA, and Jeff and his allies, we got an early start in Iowa. Thanks to Bernie and his team, the campaign talked about the issues that mattered in the Heartland. Thanks to approximately 85,000 Iowans on caucus night, all of us together pulled off one of the most improbable “virtual tie” elections in American history.

If just a few more progressive organizations had had the foresight of PDA, and of Jeff and his friends, Bernie Sanders would now be President.

Think about that. He’s the most popular progressive in the country. He’s regarded as honest and authentic. He would have inspired “yuge” youth turnout. And he would have done a much better job of holding on to independents and working class White votes in the Midwest. That’s why all

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Bernie Sanders for Governor of Iowa
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questions about corporate campaign contributions and appears to think (wrongly) that a \$15 minimum wage would be unpopular in Iowa. So far he is a "business as usual" candidate who claims to be both pro labor and pro education, but has little to say about how to win back control of the legislature.

There are some other candidates, including former state chair Dr. Andy McGuire, a key architect of the disastrous presidential campaign in Iowa, and corporate CEO Fred Hubbell, a political contributor and fundraiser. That either of them will promote any progressive ideas on health care, wages, or campaign finance seems highly unlikely, but who knows? Strange things happen in politics. ✨

-Jeff Cox

Ringside at the Capitol
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voters to the polls and vote intelligently. Democrats used to have a system of getting out the vote on election day. It appears as though many people didn't like to be reminded to vote, so we stopped doing that to prevent hurting their feelings. How ya feeling now? ✨

--Marty Ryan works for the Iowa Justice Reform Consortium

Hindsight 2020
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the polls a year ago showed Sanders doing much better against Trump.

So it's very hard to imagine Bernie losing Wisconsin or Michigan or Pennsylvania. He would have done better against Trump in Iowa and Ohio. In fact, it's hard to see what state that Hillary Clinton won that Bernie Sanders would not also have won--which means he would have been President.

No Trump. Instead, President Sanders. That's what Hindsight 2020 means.

Only next time, let's show the foresight that Jeff and his friends showed when they hosted PDA around that public library table 3 years ago, to draft Bernie to run... ✨

--Steve Cobble is a co-founder of Progressive Democrats of Iowa

It's not enough to organize people with jobs; you have to organize the unemployed" -- meaning potentially the entire community.
-Barbara Ehrenreich